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2138 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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March 1, 2004

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
2138 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to request that the Committee hold hearings concerning a series of allegations regarding misconduct in the University of Colorado's football program. Reports have detailed, at a minimum, a widespread culture of disrespect toward women within the Colorado athletic department, producing an atmosphere where sexual assaults are condoned and covered up by university officials. Unfortunately, there is evidence this culture exists at other universities as well.

With every passing day, new allegations and reports bring to light the extent to which the University of Colorado's athletic recruitment program, as well as other college's programs, are spiraling dangerously out of control. To date, seven women from the University of Colorado have come forward with allegations that they were raped by players or recruits of the University football team. The following is a brief synopsis of some of the allegations that have surfaced:

- Katie Hnida, the football team's placekicker, claims to have been raped by a teammate in the Summer of 2000. She also claims that her teammates would verbally abuse her, make sexually graphic comments, expose themselves to her, rub up against her, and grope her. (*Another Victim at Colorado*, Sports Illustrated, Vol. 100, Issue 8, p. 80).
- A woman claims to have been sodomized after meeting two football players at a bar in August 2002. She does not remember the incident and believes she may have been drugged. (*Sixth Rape Allegation Surfaces at CU*, CNN.com, Fri. Feb. 19, 2004).

- Three women have come forward with charges that they were raped at or just after a party in December 2001. These women have filed federal lawsuits against the program and the University under Title IX. (*Out of Control?*, Sports Illustrated, Vol. 100, Issue 8, p. 64). Some of the allegations are that Colorado's football team used alcohol, strippers, professional female escorts and promises of sex with undergraduates to entertain high school players traveling to Boulder on recruiting trips. (*Colo. Football Probe Intensifies*, Washington Post, Feb. 20, 2004, D01).
- A woman who worked in the athletic department claims to have been raped by a football player in September 2001. She claims that Coach Barnett tried to intimidate her from going to the police with her story by telling her that he would back the player "100 percent" if she pressed charges. (*Sixth Rape Allegation Surfaces at CU*, CNN.com, Fri. Feb. 19, 2004).

The allegations that the University of Colorado's athletic department used sex as a means of recruitment have been confirmed by a number of adult entertainment companies and escort services. One striptease operator recently stated that he regularly sends lap-dancers to perform for Colorado athletes, and it turns out that the most recent performances were booked well after Katie Hnida's rape allegations became public. (*Disciplinarian Barnett Can't Avoid Scandals*, MSNBC.com, Feb. 14, 2004). A local firm called "Hard Bodies" has said that it has provided exotic dancers for CU recruiting parties and that the athletic department has picked up the bill. And an assistant athletic director in the program has admitted to making calls to an escort service before a big party for recruits. (*Colo. Football Probe Intensifies*, Washington Post, Feb. 20, 2004, D01).

The school's board of regents has formed an investigative panel, and Governor Owen has recently named the state's attorney general as special prosecutor to investigate the allegations. While I applaud these efforts to get to the bottom of the CU scandal, this case raises numerous concerns over several broader issues within the Committee's jurisdiction, such as the Violence Against Women Act, the criminal laws, and the antidiscrimination laws.

One issue that concerns VAWA is whether or not the campus grant program, which is small to begin with, should be expanded. Currently the program is structured to provide funds for prevention and education, but it does not provide for legal services, mental health counseling, or medical care after the rape or assault has occurred. In addition, most of the programs under VAWA focus on adult victims of violence. However, with events such as those happening at the University of Colorado and other college campuses, we should be exploring how we can provide services for violence against young women and teenagers. Because VAWA will need to be reauthorized in 2005, this issue is particularly ripe for a hearing.

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
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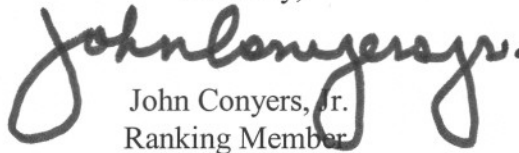
In addition to exploring the adequacy of the programs and grants under VAWA, this Committee should also consider the legislation I introduced in January 2003. H.R. 394, the "Violence Against Women Civil Rights Restoration Act of 2003," makes a person who commits a crime of violence motivated by gender, thus depriving the victim of another prescribed right, civilly liable to the victim. This important piece of legislation restores the ability of victims of gender-motivated violence to seek justice in federal court, where there is a connection to interstate commerce. If anything, the Colorado scandal demonstrates the need for this type of legislation.

Finally, the use of sex and alcohol as a recruiting tool is a potential violation of a woman's civil rights under Title IX. The civil rights laws are designed to prevent discrimination against protected classes of people such as women. As a civil rights law, Title IX addresses the issue of sexual inequity in American academe; its central tenet is that no one should face gender-based inequalities and sex discrimination under any education program that receives federal funds. Our Committee is charged with ensuring that our laws adequately protect our citizens' civil rights; the University of Colorado scandal certainly raises an issue as to whether or not our laws are doing an adequate job. In addition, we should also explore what role, if any, the Department of Justice should play in enforcing Title IX in this or other similar lawsuits.

Although the current scandal surrounds the University of Colorado and its coach and athletic department, the issue appears not to be limited to the University of Colorado. Earlier this month St. John's University suspended five basketball players for breaking curfew to visit a strip club while on the road for a game. And the University of Minnesota is looking into allegations that football recruits visited bars and strip clubs last year. The concept of women as a reward for male athletes is a rampant attitude throughout both college and pro football.

This Committee should take the opportunity amidst all this scandal to examine whether or not our laws are adequately protecting both the safety and equality of women on campus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "John Conyers, Jr." in a cursive style. The signature is written over the printed name and title.

John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member